

CT Trust Resource ID: 2634

HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY – BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

State Historic Preservation Office, DECD, One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06103

*Note: Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

Inventory form modified for the Creative Places - Arts & Letters Project

GENERAL INFORMATION

Building Name (Common): Portland Post OfficeOther Name(s) (Historic): Portland Post OfficeStreet Address or Location: 320 Main Street, PortlandTown/City: Portland

Village:

County: Middlesex

Designation(s):

Owner(s): UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICEPublic/Private: PublicLatitude: 41.5777 Longitude: -72.6370

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Government: post officeHistoric Use: Government: post officeAccessibility to public: Yes Exterior visible from public road? YesInterior accessible? If yes, explain: During open hoursStyle of building: Neo-classical Date of Construction: c. 1940Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate) Cut Stone, BrickStructural Systems(s): Structural iron or steel. Load bearing masonryRoof(Type): Hip (Material): Asphalt ShingleNumber of Stories: 1 Approximate Dimensions: 48' x 59'Structural Condition: ExcellentExterior Condition: ExcellentLocational Integrity: On original site Moved, When: NAAlterations?: No If yes, explain: NARelated outbuildings or landscape features: ShedSurrounding Environment: Commercial

Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The Portland Post Office is located on the west side of Main Street on a .46-acre lot, just across Middlesex Avenue from the Portland High School (now Brownstone Intermediate School). This area is in a Village District Zone, which supports the preservation of historic character.

Other notable features of building or site:

This is a Depression-era post office similar in design to many others but constructed of brick and local brownstone. The 48' x 59' floor plan has a hip roof with a cupola. The south façade facing Main Street, has five bays marked by shallow brick pilasters, surmounted by a brownstone frieze. Windows are eight-over-eight double-hung sash. The central entryway is a Neo-classical-styled pair of doors and transom, surrounded by pilasters and lintel with cornice. The foundation is brownstone blocks.

The interior is well-preserved with little change. Austin Mecklem's mural of tobacco farming occupies the high area of the south end of the main public space, as is typical in many period post offices.

Architect: Federal Works Agency; Mural by Austin Mecklem Builder/Maker: Federal Works Agency Public Buildings Administration

Historical or Architectural importance:

The Fine Arts Section of the Federal Works Agency sponsored mural art for post offices in all 48 states, through competitions and later commissioning selected artists. Mecklem was chosen to portray the characteristic Connecticut Valley crop, shade tobacco in 1942, for the Portland Post Office. This was near the end of the program, as Federal art projects were discontinued at the onset of World War II. Austin Mecklem (1894-1951) was born in Califax, Washington and studied at Washington State University, the San Francisco School of Fine Arts, the Art Students League in New York and in Paris and Holland. Artists Austin Merrill Mecklem 'Meck' and Marianne Greer Appel (1913-1988) married in 1937 and lived and worked in Woodstock, New York as part of the Woodstock artists' colony, Maverick. Mecklem received notable commissions from the WPA, including the painting of murals for the Recorder of Deeds Building in Washington, D. C., the Wrangell, Alaska Custom House and Post Office, and the Post Office in Portland, Connecticut. Mecklem also taught art at the Museum School in Portland, Oregon, the Art Students League in New York, the Albright Art School in Buffalo, New York, and the Woodstock School of Painting.

Sources:

Post Office Mural – Portland CT. Living New Deal web site. Accessed at: <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/post-office-mural-portland-ct/> .
Park, Marlene. 1984. Democratic vistas: Post offices and public art in the New Deal. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
Shapiro, Harriet E. 2011. A Finding Aid to the Mecklem, Austin Merrill and Marianne Greer Appel Papers, 1910-2006. Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution. Accessed at: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/austin-merrill-mecklem-and-marianne-greer-appel-papers-15858> .
'Speaking of Pictures ... This is Mural America for Rural Americans.'12/04/1939. Life Magazine.

Photographer: Charlotte Hitchcock **Date:** 4/17/2015

View: East view

Form completed by: Charlotte Hitchcock **Printed On:** May 24, 2016

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



Northeast view - Portland Post Office, 320 Main St.

FOR OFFICE USE:

Town # _____ **Site#** _____ **UTM** _____
District ☐ S ☐ NR **If NR, specify:** ☐ Actual ☐ Potential